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RESEARCH NOTE

A book festival dedicated to the Mafia(s): a report from the first two editions of the Trame Festival, Lamezia Terme, 2011–2012

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This article provides a detailed report on the first two editions of the festival of books about the Mafia held in Lamezia Terme (Calabria, Italy) in June 2011 and June 2012. The article reviews the 101 books presented in the two festivals. The analysis of the books presented at the public event gives us the opportunity to analyse the ways in which the Mafia's public image has been constructed in recent times. The books presented at the first two Festival editions have been divided by the authors into four main categories: books written by journalists, by magistrates, by Mafia researchers and books by activists from the anti-mafia movement. The debate on Mafia and anti-mafia seems to have a number of different 'voices', some of which (like those of magistrates and journalists) prevail over others, and this has led to a public debate about organised crime at a series of levels.

Keywords: Mafia; anti-mafia movement; book festival; Lamezia Terme

The level of public attention accorded to organised crime, as with many other issues, tends to move in cycles. But compared with other social problems, the question of the mafias is more susceptible to this kind of fluctuation because of the spectacular nature of the news it generates. Murders, corruption, blackmail, conspiracies, personalised conflicts, decade-long feuds, illegal trafficking, betrayals and supergrasses are all ingredients which for the public hold a certain fascination and which are also common themes in TV shows. In many cases, cycles of attention are linked to tragic events, as with the murders of important figures from the state apparatus, a massacre, or the arrest of well-known personalities (be they from the mafias, civil society or public institutions). As well as an increase in public attention, this kind of event has also led, in recent decades, to changes in the law regarding the mafias as the state has reacted to certain events. There have also been examples of mobilisation against the mafias from within civil society, which have led to important anti-mafia events and to the construction of increasingly active and widespread anti-mafia organisations.

But these attention cycles are not only connected to murderous events or illegal activities. In many other instances the success or attention generated by cultural events – films or books, for example – sparks a renewed public interest in these themes, and this has been a consistent trend. From the mid-1980s onwards, the popular TV series *La Piovra* (*The Octopus*, which is also a name given to the Sicilian Mafia) helped to change in an important way the collective

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imagination of Italians regarding the *mafias* (this term is used in the plural here to denote all the criminal organisations in Italy, and not just the Sicilian Mafia). Later, a new generation of men and women, not all from the South, discovered and then looked further into the issue of the mafias after having seen the film *I cento passi* (2000) in the cinema or on TV. The film tells the story of Peppino Impastato, a young communist who was killed by the Sicilian Mafia in 1978. Roberto Saviano's novel *Gomorra*, which has sold more than two million copies in Italy and more than 10 million in the 52 countries where it has been translated, has grabbed the public's attention and provoked debate, transforming its author into an anti-mafia icon and the symbol of civil resistance against the Camorra.

Thus, if we take a long-term view, we could argue that public focus on the mafias has remained at a high level in recent years, especially in comparison with previous historical periods. The proliferation of journalistic coverage of the mafias is an example of this interest, as is the appearance of periodicals and numerous books dedicated to the issue. The numerical increase in cultural products has also been accompanied by an increasing diversity of areas covered – from biographies about famous mafiosi to studies of the role of women, to the question of the relationship of mafiosi with religion to stories of how those on the run have finally been arrested.

The time had come for a Mafia Book Festival, and the first was held in Lamezia Terme, Calabria, from 22 to 26 June 2011. The force behind the festival was Tano Grasso, the historic leader of the anti-racket and anti-usury movement, who at that time was responsible for cultural policies for the local council in Lamezia Terme. The artistic direction of the festival was entrusted to Lirio Abbate, journalist for *L'Espresso* magazine, who has been forced to live under protection for years due to his investigative work into the mafia. The festival attracted a large audience and was widely covered in the mass media. This encouraged the organisers to mount a second event, which was held from 20 to 24 June 2012.

In 2011 and 2012 the festival programme (which can be found, alongside a series of other documents and links, at: <http://www.tramefestival.it/festival/>), was rich and wide-ranging, with the presentation of 52 books in 2011 and 49 books in 2012. As in many book festivals, authors discussed their work with journalists, anti-mafia activists, magistrates, researchers, academics and local politicians. These presentations, which were held in various places in Lamezia Terme (a square, a historic palazzo, a park, a road closed to traffic) were packed with people of all kinds, many of who had come from other parts of Calabria and the rest of Italy.

Given that this was a book festival and not an academic conference, the choice of books was governed by two broad criteria: they had to have been published recently and it also helped that the authors, or their books, were well known. Despite their wide-ranging nature (a characteristic of work on the mafias) these books can be divided into four broad categories, of which the first and biggest was of books written by journalists. Of the 101 books chosen in 2011 and 2012, 47 fell into this category. Since they are so important, it is interesting to think about the subjects journalists who work on the mafia tend to look at. If we examine these 47 titles, we can see that in some there is an account of a specific incident (for example, Manuela Latì and Giuseppe Baldessaro's *Avvelenati* or Filippo Veltri's *Ritorno a San Luca. Dal paese dei sequestri alla strage di Duisburg*); others tell the stories of mafiosi or victims of the mafias (as with Fabrizio Feo, *Matteo Messina Denaro. La mafia del camaleonte*; Francesca Barra, *Il Quarto comandamento. La vera storia di Mario Francese che osò sfidare la mafia e del figlio Giuseppe che gli rese giustizia* or Vincenzo Vasile, *Era il figlio di un pentito*). Or they analyse a particular area or region in detail, often with the use of judicial documents (Rosaria Capacchione, *L'oro della camorra*; David Lane, *Terre profanate*; Gigi Di Fiore, *L'Impero*; Nino Amadore, *La*

Calabria sottosopra; Vincenzo Spagnolo, *Cocaina SpA*); or they underline the way the mafias have moved into the north of Italy (Marta Chiavari, *La quinta mafia. Come e perché la mafia al Nord è fatta anche da uomini del Nord*; Giovanni Tizian, *Gotica. 'Ndrangheta, mafia e camorra oltrepassano la linea*). Finally, there were books about the victims of the mafia, above all the magistrates Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, especially with the twentieth anniversary of when they were killed along with their bodyguards (Attilio Bolzoni, *Uomini soli. Pio La Torre e Carlo Alberto dalla Chiesa, Giovanni Falcone e Paolo Borsellino*; John Follain, *I 57 giorni che hanno sconvolto l'Italia. Perché Falcone e Borsellino dovevano morire?*; Francesco Viviano e Alessandra Ziniti, *Visti da vicino. Falcone e Borsellino, gli uomini e gli eroi*).

The second largest category at the festival was the 22 books written by magistrates who have played important institutional roles in the struggle against the mafias. For this reason, they are often well known and many people have read their articles, heard them on the radio or seen them on television. This is true, for example, of the Procuratore Nazionale Antimafia Piero Grasso; the ex-Procuratore of Palermo Giancarlo Caselli; the ex-Procuratore of Reggio Calabria Giuseppe Pignatone; and others such as Antonio Ingroia, Nicola Gratteri, Maurizio De Lucia, Roberto Scarpinato, Raffaele Cantone, Michele Prestipino, Piercamillo Davigo, Armando Spataro, and Piergiorgio Morosini. These magistrates have been protagonists of the fight against organised crime over a long period of time and they have built up a deep knowledge and wide-ranging experience of the mafias and the anti-mafia movement. What do magistrates write when they write about the mafia, often in collaboration with journalists? As with some journalists, they tend to focus on broad analyses of the problems, which are often linked to their own life experiences rather than their professional careers. An example of this type of work is Giancarlo Caselli's book, written with his son Stefano (*Le due guerre. Perché l'Italia ha sconfitto il terrorismo e non la mafia*), which compares political terrorism and the mafias – the two phenomena which might be described as the most difficult problems faced by Italy in the post-war period. Caselli, the current Procuratore in Turin, like many other important magistrates, policemen and carabinieri, experienced these issues at a personal and at a professional level. This is also the case with Armando Spataro, who has written about his long experience within the Milanese judiciary in *Ne valeva la pena. Storie di terrorismi e di mafie, di segreti di Stato e di giustizia offesa*. Magistrates have also discussed the factors that hamper the efficiency of the judicial system or hold back their work (this is particularly true of the books by Piercamillo Davigo and Leo Sisti, *Processo all'italiana* and Piergiorgio Morosini, *Attentato alla giustizia. Magistrati, mafie e impunità*).

The third largest category of books included those by researchers and historians of the mafias. There were 13 of these, of which eight were by university researchers or professors. Obviously, these books have a different outlook from many of the others we have discussed. They are based on research carried out with the use of 'scientific' methodologies, and are trying to create new levels of knowledge about the mafias. Subjects covered here include extortion rackets in Campania (Giacomo Di Gennaro and Antonio La Spina, eds., *I costi dell'illegalità. Camorra ed estorsioni in Campania*); the history of the Camorra around the time of the unification of Italy (Marcella Marmo, *Il coltello e il mercato. La camorra prima e dopo l'unità d'Italia*); the historical origins of the Sicilian Mafia and the other mafias (John Dickie, who presented books at both festivals, *Cosa nostra. Storia della mafia siciliana* in 2011 and *Onorate Società* in 2012); the links between mafiosi and local elites who were willing to set up alliances with them, the so-called 'grey zone' (Rocco Sciarrone, ed., *Alleanze nell'ombra. Mafie ed economie locali in Sicilia e nel Mezzogiorno*); and the ways in which criminal groups grow territorially (Enzo Ciconte, *'Ndrangheta padana*; Federico Varese, *Mafie in movimento. Come il crimine organizzato conquista nuovi territori*).

The fourth and final category of books presented at the festival was those written by anti-mafia activists. However, it is not always easy, given the subject matter, to distinguish between activists and other categories of author. There are authors who carry out research alongside active work in the anti-mafia movement, and militants who have spent many years studying the mafias. For example, we might place Umberto Santino and Nando Dalla Chiesa in this hybrid category. Santino, with his wife Anna Puglisi, is the founder of the Centro Siciliano di documentazione ‘Giuseppe Impastato’, which remains one of the most important anti-mafia organisations on the national scene. Nando Dalla Chiesa is the son of the Carabinieri general and one-time Prefect of Palermo, Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa, who was killed by the Sicilian Mafia in 1982.

At the first festival, Umberto Santino presented a book which, through a critical review of books about the mafia, analyses the way that debates and shifts in public opinion have been constructed around these issues (*Don Vito a Gomorra. Mafia e antimafia tra papelli, pizzini e bestseller*). Meanwhile, Dalla Chiesa discussed an anthology of classic texts on the Mafia (of which he was editor) made up of texts which, he argued, have been largely forgotten. Other activists at the festival have included Aldo Pecora from the Calabrian group ‘Ammazzateci tutti’, who presented a volume about the magistrate Antonino Scopelliti, killed by the ‘Ndrangheta in 1991 (*Primo sangue*); Anna Maria Santoro, a teacher from Palermo and an activist in the ‘addiopizzo’ committee (*Una mamma in addiopizzo*); and Claudio La Camera, who discussed a collection of papers he edited from a conference about the ‘Ndrangheta held in Reggio Calabria in November 2010 (*Vincere la ‘ndrangheta. Metodologie di contrasto e continuità di azioni*). Giovanni Impastato told the story of his brother Peppino, an innocent victim of the Corleonese Mafia (*Resistere a Mafiopoli. La storia di mio fratello Peppino Impastato*); and Francesco Forgione spoke about his published investigation into the business affairs and connections of some important criminal groups linked to the ‘Ndrangheta (*Porto franco. Politici, manager e spioni nella repubblica della ‘ndrangheta*).

In Italy, a key category in this area (and in general) is that associated with priests and other representatives of organised religion. In the South in particular, the work of many priests inevitably comes into conflict with the mafias. The important role played by some of them also became clear because of the tragic murders of two priests in the 1990s, Padre Pino Puglisi and Don Peppe Diana. The first festival featured two books by priests: one by Don Giacomo Panizza, about his experiences as a young priest from the North who chose to live in Calabria (*Qui ho conosciuto purgatorio, inferno e paradiso*); and the other by Don Tonino Palmese, who is linked to the ‘Libera’ organisation, and who looks at the victims of the mafias (*Patì sotto il peso delle mafie. Via Crucis in memoria di tutte le vittime di mafia*). In the second festival three illustrated books were presented, whose stories focused on important victims of the mafias and key moments in the struggle against organised crime.

What conclusions can we draw about the books presented at the two festivals? If we take a wider view it is clear that the selected books reflected current debates about the mafias – debates that focus on certain areas and neglect others that are just as important. Books by journalists, magistrates and activists often concentrate on the more spectacular aspects of the mafias, and help to create a somewhat deformed picture of reality. For example, there are books that sold very well which look at the mafia in the north of Italy and, even if they do often present an interesting analysis of the ways the mafia has spread beyond its heartlands, they seem to underestimate the weight and the role of the mafias in the regions where they were born, and exaggerate their importance in terms of the economy and society in other regions where they have increased their influence, thus underplaying the contextual factors which help the infiltration and bedding down of these criminal groups. More generally, and almost certainly involuntarily, some books seem to

see the mafias as omnipotent and omnipresent – something which is, at the end of the day, more of a myth than a reflection of reality. This type of representation of the mafia is exacerbated by confusion over the role of many authors working in this area, which sometimes makes it difficult to understand their point of view. So, there are magistrates who become historians or economists, or journalists and anti-mafia activists who use problematic sociological categories in their work, or researchers who combine historical research with intense levels of anti-mafia activity – and it is not always clear whether they are writing as activists or researchers. Moreover, as we are dealing with illegal and hidden organisations, the entire debate is often reduced to judicial issues. Trials and investigations are the main areas where we are able to find information about mafiosi, their business affairs, illegal activities, their victims and their allies. Social scientists, if the truth be told, sometimes find it difficult to create any distance between their own work and the points of view held by many magistrates, in part because of the intrinsic difficulty of researching into such a complicated phenomenon beyond what is available in judicial records and the problems of integrating these sources with other means of carrying out research; and in part because of the lack of resources available to Italian universities in particular. In this complicated scenario, it is clear that these mafia book festivals have successfully brought together a competent group of authors who are among the main architects of the construction of a contemporary public narrative and debate about organised crime in Italy. In this way, the festival organisers have transformed the solitary voices of authors into a chorus which, in the creation of an event, has gained wide media coverage. The coming of age of the anti-mafia movement provides hope for further future success in the fight against organised crime.

Translation by John Foot

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